

Hunt Sabbing

The first time I was ever described as a “hunt sab” I didn’t even know what the words meant. I had never heard of it before.

I had been arrested for obstruction during a demo where we protested against the fur coat industry. In court the prosecution lawyer made a point of describing me as a “hunt saboteur” in order to prejudice the magistrate against me. They laughed derisively at me not knowing what they were talking about.

After the court proceedings (I was fined) some friends explained to me what the term “hunt saboteur” meant.

That was in 1982 when I lived in London.

A few years later when I lived at Glastonbury I got together with a few other people who were against bloodsports and we tried to start up a Glastonbury sab group. We had some help from the more established Bath hunt sabs group. I foolishly got separated from the others and stood in front of a red-coated hunter who was on horseback. He rode over me, knocking me down and giving me several deep bruises on my back.

In the 1990s when I moved to Exeter I went out sabbing with the Exeter group.

At first I was useless. Just an extra person in the landrover. Every Saturday I would ride along with the hunt sabs and try to learn more about the process of sabbing. In those days fox hunting and other bloodsports were still legal in the U.K.

The basic principle in sabbing was to get in the way and save the life of the hunted animal. The hunters and their followers were into extreme violence, blood and death but, hypocritically, they always accused us, the animal defenders, of being the “violent” ones. The culture of hunting, shooting and fishing is a liars’ culture. Their entire way of thinking is along the lines of pretending the fish they caught was bigger, pretending the fox or hare or stag was evil, pretending the kill was bigger than in actuality etc. Their culture is proud of knowing the “lie of the land”. Truth is not valued highly by hunters.

In the 1980s they claimed that all hunt sabs were “paid by the Kremlin”. They said that we were given money and a packed lunch by Soviet spies. In the 1990s, after the Soviet Union had fallen the hunters still told the same lie but they changed the detail of it. In the 1990s version it was supposed to be “Linda McCartney” who was paying us and sending us packed lunches.

We continued and I learned a few things. How to blow a hunting horn, how to “rate the pack” (which means telling the hounds to leave the trail alone) and how to anticipate the hunters’ plan for the day.

I was always tired. I was in my forties by then and I was doing a degree course in Fine Art. I didn't have a very good student loan so I had to supplement my student income by working in two entirely separate part-time cleaning jobs. Then sabbing on Saturdays. I was always tired.

In 1995 I graduated and so was able to take a more active role in the sabbing.

In 1997 Tony Blair's Labour Party was elected to govern the U.K. I voted for them because they promised a free and open debate on the possibility of banning bloodsports. There was overwhelming support for a ban of fox hunting, stag hunting, hare coursing etc. and the ban came into force in the U.K. in the early 21st Century.

Cruelty to animals in the form of blood sports continued illegally and so it is necessary for anti-hunt groups to still exist. The hunt supporters still have violent attitudes and behaviour and I have been attacked a few times over the years. In 2014 a hunter rode his horse at me and, veering past, he grabbed my head and lifted me from the ground, using the force generated by the forward movement of his horse to propel me several metres along the road. His followers then came at us in a mob and attempted to drag me along the ground into the path of a reversing vehicle.

The incident was recorded in video format by several people on their mobile telephones. The police took statements and logged video evidence. They then sat on the evidence for several months before passing the case to the Crown Prosecution Service to be dismissed and not proceeded with.

Local police forces are often corrupted by bribes from wealthy farmers and landowners. The police in Britain tend to continue the medieval tradition of working for the moneyed classes and the "Lord of the Manor" against the common people. This tends also to be the same in republican countries where "Lord of the Manor" translates into "Lord of the Money". There are clearly backhanders, cronyism and old school tie networks.

Ever since "Brexit" hunters have been pretending that the ban was imposed by the European Union and that an independent Britain could reverse it, whereas in reality the ban was entirely the decision of the majority of the British people and nothing to do with the European Union. Sadly bloodsports continue in several E.U. countries such as France and Spain. In spite of all the corruption in the system there is still overwhelming public support for increasing and strengthening the ban on cruel sports. Sabs have become more and more efficient at monitoring the lawbreakers and securing prosecutions. The hunters continue to lie. The truth continues to thwart them.

I'm too old to go sabbing these days and I have to admit that I always found the experience enormously tiring. I hated being squashed up together with all the other sabs in the back of a landrover for long periods of time. I loved the times when we were out of the landy and doing what we were there to do, stopping the violence, stopping the killing. Running across fields and getting the hounds to put their heads up - which means they were off the scent.

Yes, it's true that carnivorous animals hunt. Yes, it's true that there are parts of the world where humans hunt and fish for food in environments where it is difficult for them to live any

other way. Yes, we know that. We aren't as foolish as some people may suppose. We know. But humans committing deliberate, organised cruelty to animals in the name of bogus "sport" is a different matter altogether.

Ultimately I would criticise society for not providing ordinary people with better facilities for leisure time activities. Things are better than they used to be. Years ago we didn't have the internet or multi-programme streaming TV services. But people need more than that. I can understand that some people turn to crimes of violence against each other and against wild animals through sheer boredom. They need creative forms of expression for fun, games, puzzles and the arts. More education in the arts and skills, more public libraries, theatre workshops, craft making workshops, paintballing groups, role playing games, music clubs and so on and so on.